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SPECTATORS OF THE FUTURE: THE DOMESTIC SPACE AS A THEATRICAL STAGE IN EXHIBITIONS AND POPULAR FAIRS (1955-1970)

Since their emergence in the 19th century, popular exhibitions and fairs have played a primary role as a means of disseminating the ideas of designers and as a space for educating the public on the values of modern life. Especially after World War II, architects and designers used these exhibitions to reach people with speculations about life in houses in that could never realistically be inhabited. A recurring strategy in many of these proposals involved transforming these exhibitions into a theatrical stage. Visitors thus became spectators of the future, contemplating shows in which the actors, and even the designers themselves, performed domestic actions in amazing scenarios. This research eludes the usual architectural reading to focus interest on the scenographic analysis of selected housing prototypes designed in Europe between the second half of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1970s. The study aims to identify the key elements of theatrical representation in the mise en scène of the domestic space of these architectures on display.

Since their appearance in the 19th century, popular exhibitions and fairs have played a primary role as a means of disseminating the ideas of designers and as a space for educating the public in the values of modern life. These exhibitions also became strategic places for governments and companies to recover the economy and promote the consumer society after the crises caused by the two World Wars of the 20th century: from architecture and design, some of the most innovative proposals came precisely in these mass events turned into laboratories for experimentation on the domestic space and new models of life. Especially after World War II, designers rethought their usual communication systems to reach the public with speculations about life in houses that would never be possible to live in. And in many of their proposals, the transformation of the exhibition space into a kind of theatre stage was a common strategy. Visitors thus became spectators of the future, contemplating shows in which actors, and even the designers themselves, performed domestic actions in amazing scenarios.

This research eludes the usual architectural reading to focus interest on the scenographic analysis of some housing prototypes designed between the second half of the 1950s and the early 1970s. The staging of domestic utopia, the speculations of European architects and designers about the future life, even infiltrated the stifling atmosphere of Barcelona that the Italian designer Joe Colombo visited in the last times of the Franco dictatorship, when he was a member of the jury in a competition organized by the designer's association ADI/FAD (1969). Colombo's visit coincided with the celebration of *Hogarotel*, a fair that, since 1962, has raised expectations for the future in a country that was entering into a consumer society after decades of political and economic ostracism. And surprisingly, *Hogarotel* became the showcase for some radical designs that were received as a 'cultural revolution', like a hotel room (1969) or an *Experimental proposal for a way of life* (1971), a performance about "the liberation of playful desires"[1], subsidized by the organizing committee and closed after the opening for "inappropriate". Hardly anything is known about this story and what the presence of Colombo meant for Barcelona designers. We will try to remedy this forgetfulness through the plot thread of the *mise en scène* of the domestic space in popular exhibitions.

Act 1. *This is a house?*

In March 1956 British architects Alison (1928-1993) and Peter Smithson (1923-2003) presented their House of the Future at the *Ideal Home Jubilee*, the exhibition of furniture and household objects organised by the *Daily Mail* newspaper, which commemorated the 60th anniversary of the show with a theme dedicated to the space program and speculation about the future life. The young architects did not hesitate to accept the organisers' invitation because they knew that their ideas could thus reach a large number of people: "Since our opportunities to build come so rarely, we always seize exhibition opportunities to project our ideas beyond our aesthetic – as if our ideas had already leavened the situation"[2]. In Europe in the 1950s, popular domestic exhibitions became a territory of experimentation and a sounding board for the proposals of designers and architects. Bridging the gap, the inspiration came from the USA model, represented by designers such as Charles (1907-1978) and Ray Eames (1912-1988) whose way of doing was a stimulus for the Smithsons' work: "By the late 1950s, the 'Eames' way of looking at things had become, in a sense, everyone's style [...]. Our generation was like a child born again in post-war England to love objects of a particular international taste. The Eames instilled in us the courage to make sense of anything that appealed to us"[3]. The Eameses, to whom design was a way of life, pointed out the path to follow with their unprejudiced attitude and their adherence to mass dissemination systems, the aesthetics of spectacle and the advertising imaginary. Within the framework of their collaboration with the Herman Miller furniture company, they defined the figure of the designer as a catalyst for the values of modern life: let us remember the iconic photograph, in which they posed with a triumphant gesture on the metal structure of their own house in Pacific Palisades (1948), or their appearances on North American television programs dedicated to an essentially female audience, such as *Home*, from the NBC network,

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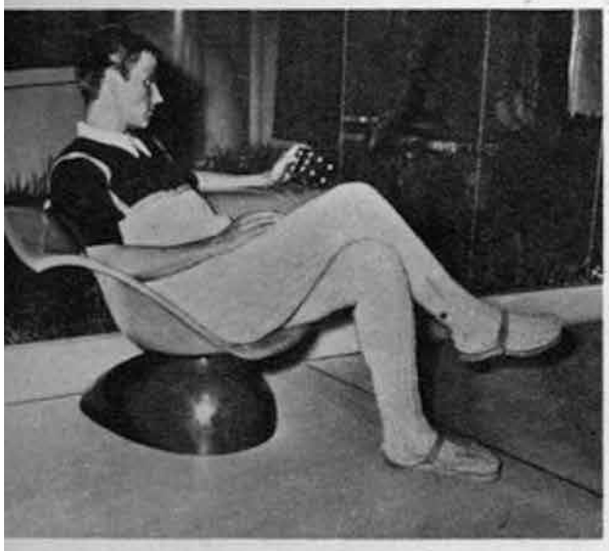
Main room of 1980 home adjoins central garden. The dining table can sink into floor.



Short-wave transmitter with push buttons controls radio-phonograph-color TV set.

This is a House?

British architects have designed this Home Of The Future to prove that living will be much easier in the brave new world of tomorrow.

STAR of the London Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition of 1956 was this eye-opening Home Of The Future designed by architects Alison and Peter Smithson. It is a one-bedroom town house that contains a garden within it. The shell is moulded of plastic-impregnated plaster and the roof is covered with aluminum foil to reflect the sun's

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Fig. 1 *Opening page of the article 'This is a house?' (ivi, p. 61).*

where they introduced the Lounge Chair to audiences in 1956.

In the precarious economic climate of post-war Europe, popular fairs and exhibitions assimilated the communication codes of American design and a spectacular conception of the exhibition space. At *Ideal Home*, British visitors could fantasize about the possibility of living a better life, with technological innovations and everyday utensils that were not 'author designs', but ephemeral and low-cost. In France, the rehabilitation of the Salon des Arts Ménagers began to become a reality in 1951, as the conditions for displaying products were rethought: "exhibitors' investments in terms of decoration have visibly increased, fantasy is required, especially since it is no longer limited by any uniform structure"[4]. The transformation of the exhibition space was expressed in greater care in the design of the stands and in the way of displaying the objects, closer to a stage set with actors or models that performed actions and demonstrations in front of the public.

But let us return to the setting of the Smithsons' House of the Future to revisit some of the questions raised by its public presentation: *This is a house?* (fig. 1), asked *Mechanix Illustrated* magazine, adding: "British architects have designed this Home of the Future to prove that living will be much easier in the brave new world of tomorrow"[5]. Although the answer remained in the air, that 'object', which promised an easier and happier life, was not a place to live, but a showcase, a space to be exhibited, something that the architects had already foreseen in a plan that it marked the circulation and the points of view of the visitors:

> The H.O.F. was both a house on exhibit and an exhibitionist house, a *peep show*. With its windowless façade and forbidden access, viewing the house meant peeping through openings made in the walls specially for that purpose, to see a couple, sometimes two couples, at home enacting the domestic life of the future[6].

In her studies on the house, Beatriz Colomina has explored in detail each of the spaces and elements that compose it, as well as the treatment given to the most important symbols of the domestic space: the table and the bed

> […] are those that can be made to disappear without a trace, sinking into the floor as if the floor, like the walls, was a storage system and the house a flexible space that could hide its actual function. A house in camouflage? A disappearing house? Or a theatrical stage set where fantasies of the future are scrutinized by an ever-curious, constantly watching audience[7].

Probably, the house was all that and much more, but what interests us here has to do with the third question, the one referring to its theatrical character. In fact, it was the architects themselves who referred to the house as a 'staging', as an exhibition house, which linked it to the Eames' way of understanding exhibition language, a way of looking and telling which, according to Peter Smithson, was related to the ideas of the German author and theatre director Bertolt Brecht. Brecht revolutionized British theatre upon his arrival in London, – precisely in 1956 – with his epic theatre, in which narration replaces plot, the spectator becomes an observer, rather than someone involved in the action taking place on stage, and where each of the scenes exists by itself:

> There is an uncanny coincidence of attitudes between the immediate post-war Eames exhibitions and the staging of Bertolt Brecht's works: in both could be felt a 'compulsion towards the real', a desire for the sense of intention that independent 'real' objects should carry and a controlled illumination. In Brecht's productions in West Berlin in the 1950s, the observer was paralysed by a remote, intensified reality (symbolised by everything that appeared in grey). Objects independent of the stage and characters more real than reality[8].

In the difficult balance between speculation about the future and the compulsion towards reality, the life represented in the Smithsons house

[1] F.X. Pouplana Solé, *Propuesta experimental para una forma de vida*, in *Anuario 71*, "Cuadernos de Arquitectura y Urbanismo", 85, 1971, 2, p. 126.
[2] A. Smithson, P. Smithson, *Thirty Years of Thoughts on the House and Housing 1951-1981*, in D. Lasdun, *Architecture in the Age of Scepticism*, London 1984, pp. 172-191: 178.
[3] A. Smithson, P. Smithson, *Just a Few Chairs and a House: An Essay on the Eames Aesthetic*, "Architectural Design", 36, 1966, pp. 432-471: 443; Spanish edition: Id., *Cambiando el arte de habitar*, Barcelona 2001, pp. 76-77.
[4] C. Leymonerie, *Le Salon des arts ménagers dans les années 1950: théâtre d'une conversion à la consommation de masse*, "Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire", 91, 2006, 3, pp. 43-56: 49.
[5] *This is a house?*, "Mechanix Illustrated", 1956, pp. 61-63: 61.
[6] B. Colomina, *Unbreathed Air 1956*, "Grey Room", 15, 2004, pp. 29-59: 41.
[7] Ivi, p. 44.
[8] P. Smithson, *Eames: World of Franklin and Jefferson*, in A. Smithson, Id., *Italian Thoughts*, Stockholm 1993, pp. 16-23: 18; Id., *Cambiando*… cit., p. 88.

had as its main focus the objects that symbolized technological progress and the plastic material, at that time the epitome of modernity. Built in just ten days, and designed for a childless couple, the house was an essentially theoretical and speculative object, ready for a hypothetical serial production. But that house that visitors saw in the spring of 1956 was an illusion; nothing in it was what it seemed to be, starting with the material, because the plastic house was not plastic "It was a simulation, a full-scale mock-up in plywood, plaster, and emulsion paint, traditional materials collaborating to produce the effect of a continuous molded-plastic surface"[9]. There can be no suspicions about the credibility of the architects, as Peter Smithson himself made it clear what the house was and what it was not: "It wasn't real. It was not a prototype. It was like the design for a masque, like theatre. Which is extraordinary"[10]. The allusion to the theatrical mask takes us back to Brecht, who used it as a distancing mechanism to prevent the viewer from identifying with the characters. This technique of alienation was, for the playwright, essential in the audience's learning process, to attenuate their emotional response and force them to reflect. As a mask and, at the same time, as a theoretical object, the House of the Future was also an invitation to reflect on the life to come. Years later, Smithson would come full circle by referring to the tradition of Renaissance theatrical structures and ephemeral decorations as an inspiration for temporary exhibitions:

> The architects of the Renaissance established ways of going about things which perhaps we unconsciously follow: for example, between the idea sketchily stated and the commission for the permanent building came the stage-architecture of the court masque; the architectural settings and decorations for the birthday of the prince […] these events were used as opportunities for the realisation of the new style; the new sort of space; the new weight of decoration; made real perhaps for a single day…the transient enjoyably consumed, creating the taste for the permanent[11].

We cannot be surprised, therefore, that the house has been declared a "make believe", a fantasy, a fiction, a set that represents life in the future year of 1981 – for us, already distant in the past[12]. Let's look for a moment at the dictionary definition of "make believe": "something that participates in the will to believe or imagine things that seem attractive or exciting, but are never real"[13]. Fantasy as an expression of the will of an era – the one in 1956? Or our own? – to believe or imagine things that seem attractive or exciting but are never real. This willingness to believe inevitably requires unreserved believers capable of assimilating the message and at the same time showing their complicity in the incarnation of the simulacrum, in the *mise-en-scène*. And those accomplices are none other than the spectators of the future who contemplate, fascinated, a house that is not exactly a house, but an advertisement, a seductive image similar to the glamorous image of Hollywood films and fashion magazines and decoration: reality or fiction? "Both the house and the objects inside were treated as images, and they combined to produce one single smooth image, a glossy ad that could be placed alongside any other ad, participating in the flow of popular imagery, intense images that dominate for a moment only to be quickly replaced"[14]. Probably, one of the decisions that most clearly expresses the theatrical character of the house is its condition as a visual device through a corridor with a series of cuts in the walls to look inside and the 'disappearance' of the roof, replaced by a platform on the upper level through which visitors pass to contemplate the space:

Outside it was a wooden rectangular box of almost blank walls. The words 'House of the Future' flashed on and off, projected onto one of the longer walls. A small opening to one end of the wall acted as an entrance. Inside was another blank box. Visitors would circle around it, peeping in at ground level through a few openings that had been cut in the walls for that purpose be-

[9] Colomina, *Unbreathed*… cit., p. 32.
[10] Ead., *Friends of the Future. A Conversation with Peter Smithson*, in *The Independent Group*, edited by H. Foster, B.H.D. Buchloh, "October", 94, 2000, pp. 3-30: 24.
[11] A. Smithson, P. Smithson, *Staging the Possible*, in Id., *Italian Thoughts*… cit., pp. 16-23: 18; quoted in Colomina, *Unbreathed*… cit., p. 32.
[12] *Ibidem*.
[13] https://dictionary.cambridge.org (last accessed 5 September 2024).
[14] Colomina, *Unbreathed*… cit., p. 34.

Fig. 2 *The audience watches the actors while they pretend to sleep in Alison & Peter Smithson's House of the Future, 'Ideal Home Exhibition', London, 1956 (© Daily Herald Archive, SSPL, Getty Images).*

Fig. 3 *Promotional brochure for the House of the Future in Tomorrowland, Disneyland Park, California, 1957 (© The Walt Disney Company, private collection).*

fore ascending to an upper level, where a viewing platform circled the inner box again, allowing a bird's-eye view into its interior, before leaving the outer box through another discreet opening on one of the short sides and finally descending to the ground of the vast Olympia exhibition hall in London[15].

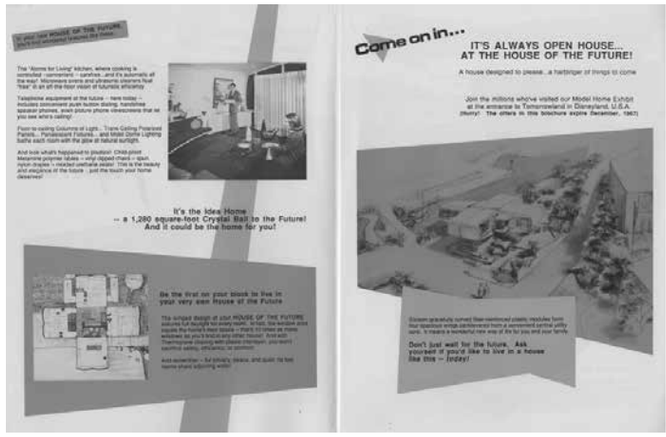
But the structure of this device also acts as a kind of limit or border; given the impossibility of entering the house, visitors can only confirm their status as spectators: "The visitors […] were carefully isolated from the rest of the *Daily Mail* exhibition-inside a case, but unable to the house. They looked inside it in complete absorption, as if watching a film or a TV program […] or a peep show"[16]. The similarity with the place of the spectator in the Brechtian epic theatre leads us to think about a whole history of observers/peepers that goes from the Renaissance anatomical amphitheatres – where the dissemination of knowledge was joined to the spectacle of dissection – to the exhibition *Futurama*, designed by Norman Bel Geddes and Albert Kahn for General Motors at the *1939 New York World's Fair*. There, visitors contemplated, from a bird's eye view, a utopian representation of the city of tomorrow embodied in a large model that simulated the world in 1960. It is worth remembering that, before achieving notoriety as a designer, Bel Geddes had worked as a theatre set designer.

The Smithsons were involved in the entire process of building the house, but it does not seem that they participated in the selection of actors, to whom, in a way, they were entrusted with the development of the performance. They had control over the costume design – by Teddy Tinling, designer of the Wimbledon uniforms – explicitly requesting that the clothes should recognise the "atmosphere" of the house, because "The overall impression given the public should be one of glamour"[17]. Tinling's designs recall those worn by actors in *Things to Come* (1936), the popular British film directed by William Cameron Menzies and with a screenplay based on Herbert George Wells' 1933 novel *The Shape of Things to Come*. An affinity that is no coincidence – noted by Reyner Banham but also by the editors of *House Beautiful* magazine, who described the house as a "wellsian fantasy in plastic"[18].

With their activities, the actors – Esme Cellier and Robin Jenkins, as two of them were called – were supposed to convince the public of the benefits of life in such a house: the actions they carried out had to do with food, cleanliness, leisure, rest and care of the body and mind. However, in the various photographs and films that have survived, it would seem that all these actions are carried out with a certain affectation or lack of naturalness which, on the other hand, would fit in with the remote futuristic atmosphere. Perhaps it is this attitude that Colomina describes it as the "aseptic" feeling of the representation of future life in the house[19], something that corroborates the scene in which the actors pretend to sleep in front of the audience (fig. 2) and the way in which they communicated with the spectators: through eye contact or, occasionally, through microphones with which they explained the operation of household appliances and the different activities they carried out.

Despite the fact that they were young, handsome and athletic – Colomina develops a whole argument about the sexual charge that is breathed in the house – the presence of these occupants was a diffuse presence, similar to that of extras or *atmospherians* in film productions, whose function is merely environmental. I borrow the word from the American writer Theodore Dreiser

[15] Ivi, p. 29.
[16] Ivi, pp. 44-45.
[17] *Life in The House of the Future*, manuscript dated 6 November 1955, in Alison and Peter Smithson Archives, Cambridge, quoted ivi, p. 39.
[18] Reyner Banham wrote an article on the House of the Future entitled *Things to Come: Architecture and Industry Look into the Future*, "Design 90", 1956, pp. 24-28; the issue of "House Beautiful", 98, 1956, 5, clipping in Alison and Peter Smithson Archives, Cambridge, quoted in Colomina, *Unbreathed*… cit., p. 32.
[19] Ivi, p. 43.



who, in 1921, wrote about the movie's extras and called them, I think for the first time, *atmospherians*, to refer to the ones that help to re-create an ambiance, a simulation of authenticity. We see the *atmospherians* only as part of the setting, but, without them, the story would not be credible because they are responsible for creating a new atmosphere, a new reality: "The *atmospherians* or backgrounders are those that give a scene the depth needed to tell a story. They convince us that they are real, so that we can consume the sense of reality"[20]. The key is not to show these actors, but to keep them from appearing too obvious and, therefore, distracting the viewer's attention. The background casting is designed for invisibility, so, although these characters are exposed to the spectator's gaze, at no time does their individuality transcend beyond their atmospheric role. With their diffuse presence, the aseptic *atmospherians* of the house increased the fiction of a future life that would never be possible to live.

The same year that the Smithsons showed their house, the Romanian architect Ionel Schein (1927-2004) exhibited his Maison tout en Plastique (1956) at the Parisian Salon des Arts Ménagers with great public success – we do not know if any representation was developed within this prototype[21]. What we do know is that the home was the culmination of an exhibition dedicated to *Plastics in the House* sponsored by *Elle*, the same magazine that promoted a traditional Japanese house designed by architect Charlotte Perriand (1903-1999). Anyone who came to the Japanese house would see a perfectly organised staging:

> At Perriand's suggestion, *Elle* magazine [...] had hired seven hostesses with Japanese features who, dressed in traditional costumes, showed the flexibility of the space and its correspondence with the use, variable according to the day or night, or the season of the year [...] To complete the setting of the perfect domestic scene [...] it had provided a series of musical recordings of traditional Japanese instruments that gave the passage through the pavilion a dreamy air. As *Elle* magazine announced, a visit to the Maison Japonaise was a chance to 'take a trip to the Far East without leaving Paris', where one could 'discover more than 100 modern ideas' for the home[22].

Unlike the climate of post-war Europe, American designers firmly believed that the house was not made of the stuff dreams are made of. With marked pragmatism, they affirmed that the ideal house had already arrived, and that it was not the house of the past or the future, it was the house of the present: "For years the crystal-gazers have been telling us what tomorrow's house will be like. We have no crystal ball. We are not interested in houses of non-existent materials, houses that can be flown from here to there, houses that substitute fancy electronic gadgetry for sensible planning. We are interested in houses that people can build and live in now – not in the year 2000"[23]. But in June 1957, in *Tomorrowland* – a future-oriented section of the Disneyland Park in California– another plastic house, sponsored by the Monsanto chemical company and designed by a team of architects and engineers from MIT, opened its doors[24]. The prototype was arranged in four symmetrical wings cantilevered over a central core and was made of glass-reinforced plastic and equipped with modern furniture and state-of-the-art technology. When it opened, it was introduced as "a house designed to please [...] a harbinger of things to come"[25], an expectation that was met by the many people who came to visit it – figures put the number of visitors at 20 million in just over a year. The project realised

[20] T. Dreiser, *Hollywood: Its Morals and Manners*, "Shadowland", V, 1921, 3, pp. 37-63: 62.
[21] The house had been built in collaboration with the French Charbonnages engineers Réné-André Coulon and Yves Magnant.
[22] M. Cruz, *La maison japonaise (París, 1957). La domesticidad, entre lo cotidiano y lo exótico*, in *Lo construido y lo pensado: correspondencias europeas y transatlánticas en la historiografía de la arquitectura*, edition S. Guerrero, J. Medina Warmburg, Madrid 2022, pp. 442-459: 454, 457.
[23] G. Nelson, H. Wright, *Tomorrow's House. A complete guide for the home-builder*, New York 1945, p. 8.
[24] The team were architects Richard Hamilton and Marvin Goody and engineers Albert G. H. Dietz, Frank J. Heger, Jr. and Frederick J. McGarry.

Fig. 4 *Muscovites contemplate one of the houses exhibited at the 'American National Exhibition', Moscow, 1959 (© The Library of Congress, Washington).*

Walt Disney's dream of creating an experimental prototype for the community of the future he intended to organize, as well as promoting the benefits of plastic in construction and everyday life objects. The house was always opened (fig. 3) and the public could get inside, touch the objects lightly or sit on the fabulous chairs and armchairs under discreet surveillance. The atmosphere of modernity was inspired by the model of the commercial spots of the time: a short film detailed the whole process of creation, from design and construction to the arrival of the potential occupants, a typical American family of four. The characters, fitting perfectly into the stereotype of the middle class, gradually discovered the wonders of domestic technology and new materials and imagined, based on the female protagonist's dream, what their life would be like. Once inside the dream, that is, once the border of real life had been crossed, the family carried out domestic activities as naturally as the voice of a narrator described their feelings, opinions and even their dialogues. The identification between the aspirations of the spectators and the dream of the actress was, in this way, assured.

We have already pointed out that the vision from a specific and previously deliberate point, although it gave the sensation of obtaining the most complete perspective, functioned as a kind of barrier or threshold that was impossible to cross, so that the distance between those who contemplated and those who were contemplated was clearly marked. It was not the only way of separating viewers from the exhibition space. At the *American National Exhibition*, held in Moscow in the summer of 1959 as part of a programme of General Dwight David Eisenhower's administration to reduce the political-ideological tensions of the early years of the Cold War, Muscovites had the opportunity to contemplate the spectacle of the 'American way of life' and realize that everything that was offered to their curious gaze was inaccessible to them. The exhibition – which continued the one organised by the USSR in June of the same year at the New York Coliseum – was visited by three million citizens, astonished by the display of consumer goods from a country that was showing off the advantages of the free market and capitalism. Alongside demonstrations – always with the proper distance – of how household appliances work, shiny cars, lifestyle or the recreation of a large supermarket, two low-cost housing models – $14,000, equipped with appliances from Macy's department store in Manhattan – grabbed the attention of most of the public: "Women visitors fingered fabrics, while men peered at innards of kitchen appliances […]. Surprise was expressed by many that six-room house was meant for only one family"[26] (fig. 4). Far from strengthening ties, the exhibition revealed the unbridgeable abyss between both countries since the day of the opening, on 24 July 1959: in front of a kitchen, US Vice-President Richard Nixon and the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, engaged in the so-called 'Kitchen Debate', a discussion on lifestyle captured live by the television cameras that followed them during the tour. As if it were a tv *soap opera*, the debate scenes show the affected theatricality with which Nixon defended the benefits of American life or how Khrushchev responded with his memorable retort against capitalism. Meanwhile, the Soviet population realised that the future had arrived, but not for them.

Act 2. *Visiona*

The *mise-en-scène* of the domestic space changed radically in the following decade with the transformation of social and political values and new aesthetic and cultural paradigms, something that had consequences in the crisis of *good design*: "The ideals transmitted by functionalism have been left behind in the era of leisure culture

[25] *Promotional brochure for the House of the Future in Tomorrowland*, Disneyland Park, California, 1957, p. 3.
[26] *'Ivan' takes a look at American Life*, "US News and World Report", XLVII, 1959, 6, pp. 40-43: 41.

[...]. The reality of the world should no longer be limited by an elite: the objects will emanate from mass culture and it will thus be able to appropriate them"[27]. In a time of social and political upheavals, the break with conventions brought with it an unprecedented domestic 'landscape', ready to assume new ways of life, new environments, new atmospheres. In a certain sense, this landscape symbolised the zero degree of inhabitation, in which the house was no longer conceived as a system of rooms but as a neutral space where the elements and equipment were organised again and again according to the needs of the occupants. The house rethought its relationship with the place and mobility and flexibility were values for an architecture that denied roots and ownership. It is worth remembering that, in the Sixties, the artistic and theatre scene was also shaken by new practices, such as performance and happenings, demanding a deep change in the treatment of exhibition spaces and in the attitude of the spectator:

> The last of the languages to be born, the happening has already asserted itself as art. It articulates dreams and collective actions. Neither abstract nor figurative, neither tragic nor comic, it reinvents itself on each occasion. Every person present at the happening participates in it. It is the end of the notion of actors and audience, of exhibitionists and observers, of activity and passivity. In a happening one can change "state" at will. To each one, its mutations or its accidents. There is no longer a single sense, as in the theatre or in the museum, no more beasts behind bars, as in the zoo. It is necessary to get out of the condition of spectator to which culture or politics have accustomed us[28].

A word burst into the language of art and design that was not part of the vocabulary of the Eameses or the Smithsons: provocation. Artists and designers sought to provoke sensations and reactions and the viewer was forced to change the contemplative attitude to participate in performative actions as an active element of the executed action. Let's take the case of the Danish designer Verner Panton (1926-1998), who con-

[27] M. Lobjoy, *Utopies, contestations et réalités, à travers design industriel et graphique. Extraits de textes du catalogue de l'exposition*, Communiqué de Presse de l'exposition *Les années pop* (Paris, Centre Pompidou, 15 mars-18 juin 2001), Paris 2001, pp. 29-33: 29.
[28] *Manifiesto sobre el happening. 1966*, J.J. Lebel, *El happening*, Buenos Aires 1967, p. 100.

Fig. 5 *Visitors to 'Visiona 2', Verner Panton's installation for the Bayer company at the "Cologne Furniture Fair", 1970 (© Bayer Archives, Tagwerc).*

Fig. 6 *Scene from the promotional film of 'Visiona 1', Joe Colombo's installation for the Bayer company at the 'Cologne Furniture Fair', 1969 (© Bayer Archives, Tagwerc).*

ceived technology as an obstacle and, therefore, decided to eliminate it from the spaces and environments he created. His objective was to provoke sensory stimuli, something that he put into practice in *Visiona 0* (1968) and *Visiona 2* (1970), the exhibitions sponsored by the chemical company Bayer at the *Cologne Furniture Fair* in order to promote the domestic use of synthetic fibers and materials, such as Dralon fibre. In *Visiona 0*, Panton created a series of experimental interior landscapes in which not only technology disappeared, but the house itself and at the most prosaic domestic actions, such as cooking or cleaning. In the promotional films, the actors move immersed in a playful performance where the only important thing was the atmosphere that incited a carefree childishness. We see them swinging, playing or simply resting on supports that force them to adopt impossible postures; or slipping away, like mischievous children, from the pursuit of an officer of the law. The extreme interiority of the environment is accentuated by its disconnection from the outside; the only contact comes with the arrival of visitors who wander around, surprised and perplexed, without an instruction manual in a space without rules. The deliberate shock comes precisely from the presence of the public, dressed in formal bourgeois attire, as in *Visiona 2* (January 1970), where a group of executives, in dark trench coats, wander through the interior of the installation (fig. 5)[29]. Panton's *Fantasy Landscape* answered the question "How will we live in the future?" with an environmental ritual, a landscape or atmosphere, an inhabitable sculpture or cave in which to take refuge or simply live; a space of relaxation for a future without time. As a negative of the expansive space race of the time, that exercise in introspection was like a journey into the conscience of the consumerist and hedonistic society.

The complex relationship with the outside world links Panton with the Italian designer Joe Colombo (1930-1971), who in turn presented in *Visiona 1* (1969) a hybrid between a living cell and an 80m2 technological laboratory, developed in three rooms: *Central-Living*, with a large bed-sofa for leisure and rest; *Night-Cell*, a climate-controlled, lockable sleeping cell with bathroom and cupboards; and *Kitchen-Box*, a kitchen and folding table. Colombo's innovative ideas, born from his links with the avant-garde arts, from the analysis of social uses and technology, appear today, diminished, by the obsolete customs that are represented in some scene of the project's promotional film: the space appears as a kind of 'warrior's resting place' where we see an actress, dressed in an apron, serving breakfast to her partner when he gets out of bed-relax (fig. 6)[30]. In other scenes of the film, visitors playfully discover the space and the elements that make it up, and even Colombo himself appears giving instructions to the workers who put the final touch on the installation. According to the script, the designer's words that close the short film now take on a strangely premonitory tone: "This is the beginning of a reflection that the man of tomorrow must bring to an end"[31].

Act 3. *Hogarotel*

In mid-November 1969, Colombo visited Barcelona as a member of the jury – along with Dieter Rams and André Ricard – for the Delta design awards organized by the ADI/FAD designer's association. The awards coincided with the celebration of *Hogarotel 9*, a fair dedicated to hotel industry and home decoration whose idea arose in 1962 at the initiative of the FAD. *Hogarotel* was held at the palace of Nations in Montjuïc and had the support of the Franco Government for the promotion of tourist infrastructures and household appliance and interior decoration companies. This was the context in which on November 13th Colombo gave the conference *La situazione del disegno oggi* – very crowded

[29] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0ngFJRk19I (last accessed 5 September 2024).
[30] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pg-3kLk5PLA (last accessed 5 September 2024).
[31] In the spring of 1970, Colombo's installation for *Visiona 1* was exhibited at a furniture fair in Valencia.

with design students – and in which, surely, he showed *Visiona* project, as well as his *Unità arredativa globale*, a prototype of a room, made up of modular elements, which was exhibited at the *Italy. The new domestic landscape* at MoMA (1972) just a few months after his sudden passing[32]. Thanks to the obituary dedicated to him by the architect Antoni de Moragas, we know some details about Colombo's stay in Barcelona:

> Lately Joe Colombo had been moving away from this progressive snobbish world and his work was taking a more popular turn, becoming interested in the sociological aspect of design, researching from the module and designing combinable multiple functions, designed essentially for mass production that it is the true design. This was precisely what he showed us with enthusiasm during his visit to Barcelona in 1969[33].

In a city without spaces to exhibit and sell the most radical design and in a country where the dictatorship was emanating its last death throes, *Hogarotel* became, almost casually, the occasion for young architects and designers to introduce proposals far from the market and taste of the population. After assigning the stands to the companies that requested them, the organization gave up some residual spaces to designers who were starting out and had "futuristic ideas"[34]. In the days when Colombo visited the city, a team of the architects Gabi Mora (1941), Helio Piñón (1942), Albert Viaplana (1933-2014) and the technical architect Francesc Serrahima, presented the prototype of a hotel room in a call to which six projects participated. The press received the idea as something that "exceeds everything hitherto known", although with reservations, because its "application in Spain, according to the creators, is currently difficult, not so much because of the economic level of the country, but especially because of the people's prejudices. This type of room, on the other hand, is only applicable to hotels, since the same outlook at home would, in the long run, be intolerable"[35].

For its part, *Triunfo* magazine celebrated *The Cultural Revolution of Hogarotel* in an article written with fine irony, where the anonymous author – we suspect he was the writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, who collaborated with the magazine at that time – referred to a "outrageous" project that disrupted public conventions: "Faced with these designs that desacralize the visual conventions of the public that goes to Hogarotel to see washing machines, a reaction of astonishment is raised with more or less doses of indignation […]. This propitious placenta turns living in a supposed hotel room into fun and self-spectacle"[36]. The authors did not propose a housing alternative from the domestic architecture itself; nor does it seem that they resorted to actors or models to stage their ideas. The people we see in the photographs – probably themselves or some friends or family –, and the fact that the intervention focused on a hotel room, allowed them to introduce variables that were surely not feasible in a home. The provisional nature of the hotel stays, "weakly experiential" and the ambiguity of the ephemeral occupants, led the architects to treat the space from "a strong load of stimuli […]. In contradiction to its character as a stand, the room is designed to be lived in and not to be contemplated"[37]. The fracture between the space to be lived and the space to be contemplated marks the distance with the proposals of the 1950s analysed above.

However, despite the differences, one of the premises was to cause confusion in the visitor through multiple points of view and a series of routes through platforms at different levels that offered unheard of perspectives. The most interesting detail is a hemispherical transparent element (fig. 7), which, like a panopticon device, "dilates the cabin and allows vision in all directions without breaking the climatic unity of the

[32] The design by Colombo was within the *Environments* category of the exhibition: *Joe Colombo*, in *Italy: the new domestic landscape achievements and problems of Italian design*, exhibition catalogue (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 26 May-11 September 1972), edited by E. Ambasz, New York 1972, pp. 170-179: 172.
[33] A. de Moragas i Gallissá, *"La vita è breve". Joe Colombo*, "Cuadernos de Arquitectura y Urbanismo", 82, 1971, p. 69.
[34] Interview with architect Xavier Pouplana Solé (Barcelona, 19 June 2023).
[35] *Nuevas líneas para habitaciones hoteleras. En el Salón Hogarotel se presenta una estancia que huye de las formas tradicionales*, "La Vanguardia Española", 12 noviembre 1969, p. 30.
[36] *En Punto. La revolución cultural de Hogarotel*, "Triunfo", XXIV, 391, 1969, pp. 10-11.
[37] *Propuesta para una habitación de hotel en Hogarotel* 9, "Arquitectura", 133, 1970, pp. 48-49.

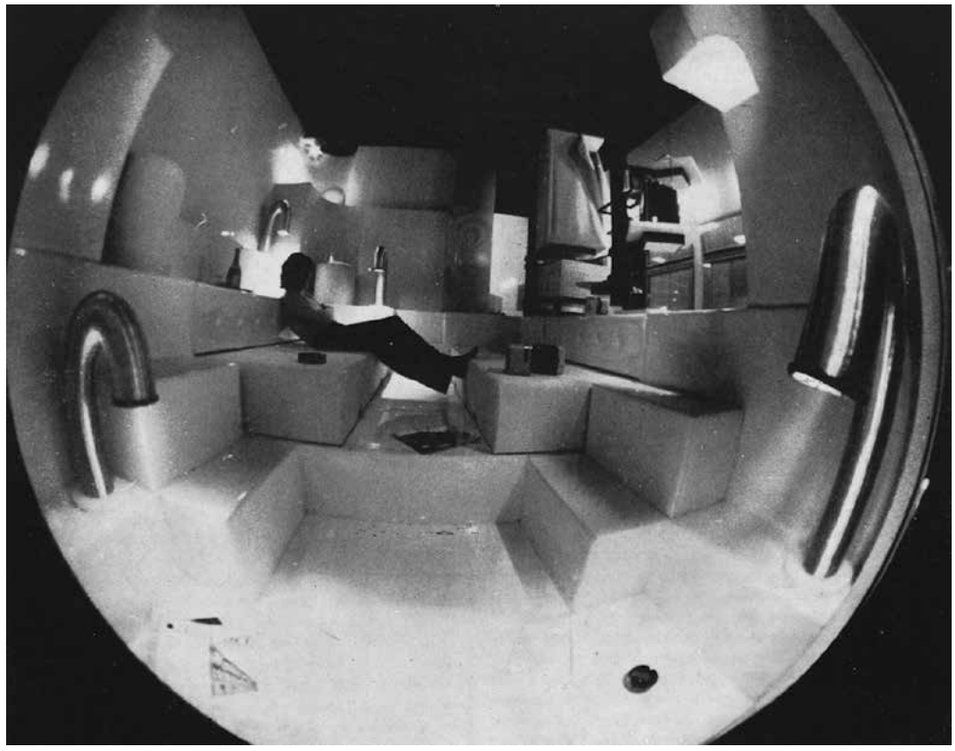


Fig. 7 *G. Mora, H. Piñón, A. Viaplana and F. Serrahima, Proposal for a hotel room in 'Hogarotel 9', 1969 (Propuesta para una habitación… cit., p. 48; photo: J.A. Munné).*

Fig. 8 *X. Pouplana Solé and collaborators, Proposal for a way of life in 'Hogarotel 10', 1970 (Propuesta experimental... cit., p. 126).*

interior. A seat located inside this element places the inhabitant psychologically on the outside, thus giving a new vision of one's own environment. Two membranes adapted to the curvature of the hemispherical element act as a diaphragm, controlling the entry of light, external vision, intimacy of the internal space, etc."[38].

Surely, the most transgressive project of that time was the one presented by the architect Xavier Pouplana Solé (1940) in *Hogarotel 10* (1970), carried out together with Francesc Fortuny, Robert Llimós and J. Guasch. The objective of this *Proposal for a way of life* was "to provoke the liberation of recreational desires" [...] which the authors considered "the most repressed by the current domestic equipment – more "representative" than appropriate to their daily use –"[39]. To do this, they created an "offbeat environment", with "certain significant references that encouraged playful behaviour, but without suggesting already established social behaviour patterns"[40]. The result, a mixture of environment and happening, transformed the designers and the spectators into part of the action: "for a spectator to decide to enter and act, it was necessary that his recreational desires first overcome his inner repression. This condition allowed the social evaluation of recreational desires through the simple relationship: actors/spectators"[41]. The experiment, subsidized by the competition's management with a meagre budget of 25.000 pesetas[42], did not go beyond the initial phase: the space-environment was closed as "inappropriate" a few days after the opening, due to the lack of control caused by the participants, which were none other than the architects and the spectators who decided to immerse themselves in a large 'pool' full of Styrofoam balls with a sink in the middle. Behind a wall, which acted as a viewing point and barrier at the same time, other spectators of the future contemplated the scene while waiting for their turn to be part of it (fig. 8).

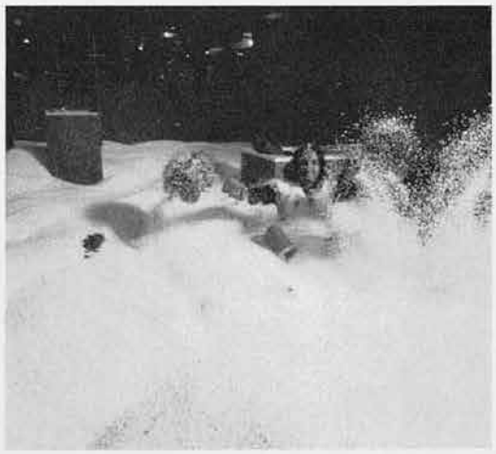
[38] *Ibidem*.
[39] Pouplana Solé, *Propuesta experimental*… cit., p. 126.
[40] *Ibidem*.
[41] *Ibidem*.
[42] Interview with architect Xavier Pouplana Solé (Barcelona, 19 June 2023). The designers got the sink and toilet for free, which they placed on top of a staircase. The Styrofoam balls came from the BASF company, thanks to the contacts of Fortuny's father. Pouplana recalled the involvement of Mario Caballero, an upholsterer and businessman dedicated to the manufacture of furniture, who had founded the MyC company in 1959, a pioneer in the introduction in Spain of author design pieces.

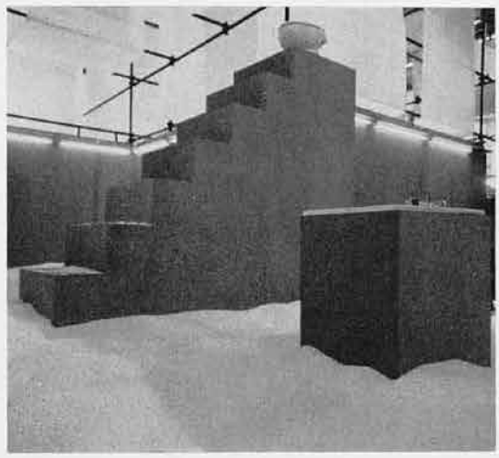
F. X. Pouplana Solé

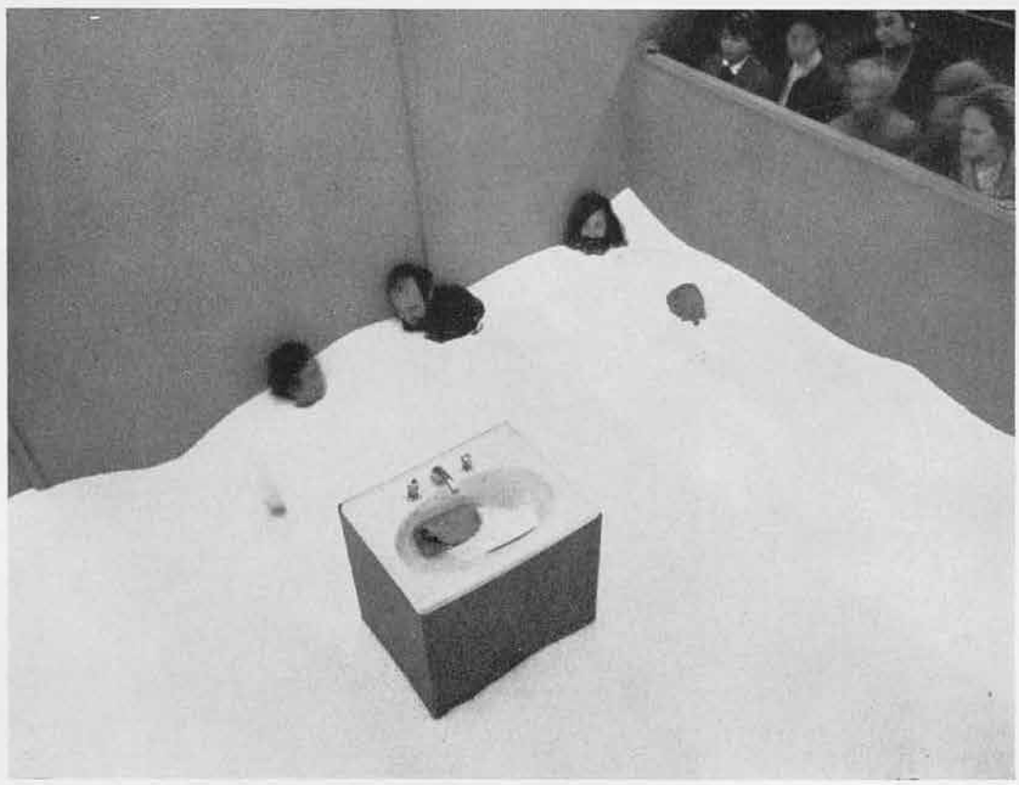
Propuesta experimental para una forma de vida

En una feria comercial – cuya función es confrontar la oferta con la demanda –, cualquier aportación no comercializada sólo puede funcionar como un tanteo encaminado a promover nuevas demandas. Una aportación de este tipo debe, por tanto, ser considerada como un experimento concebido adrede para provocar un determinado deseo (expresión de una supuesta necesidad) y medir su valor social (extensión de la posible demanda).
A partir de este enfoque, nuestra propuesta – subvencionada por el Comité Organizador de Hogarotel 10 – fue pensada como un instrumento capaz por sí solo de provocar la liberación de los deseos lúdicros, que considerábamos como de los más reprimidos por el actual equipamiento doméstico – más «representativo» que adecuado a su uso cuotidiano –. Y, en consecuencia, fue desarrollada mediante un ambiente insólito, pero con ciertas referencias significativas que incitaran a conducir un comportamiento lúdicro pero sin sugerir pautas de conducta sociales ya establecidas. La dificultad de acceso aumentaba el valor demostrativo del experimento: para que un espectador se decidiese a entrar y actuar era preciso que previamente sus deseos lúdicros vencieran a su represión interior. Esta condición permitía la evaluación social de los deseos lúdicros por la simple relación: actores/espectadores. Una encuesta más detallada por sexos, edad, nivel cultural, clase social, etc., hubiera podido ofrecernos algunos datos relativos a la distribución social de la represión interior de estos deseos.
La clausura del stand por orden de la dirección del Salón impidió la realización de la fase experimental, pero puso de manifiesto la existencia de una represión exterior.
En última instancia, el éxito del experimento hubiera podido confirmar sus mismas hipótesis operatorias; entre ellas la posibilidad de suscitar algún tipo de comportamiento determinado mediante un apropiado espacio-ambiente.

Colaboradores: F. Fortuny, R. Llimós y J. Guasch.







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